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LESSONS LEARNED FROM *OPERATION MARKET GARDEN*

by

Jennifer B. Fox  
Lieutenant Colonel

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

IN

FULFILLMENT OF THE CURRICULUM

REQUIREMENT

Advisor: William P. Snyder, PhD.

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA  
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## ABSTRACT

TITLE: Lessons Learned From *Operation Market Garden*

AUTHOR: Jennifer B. Fox, Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

*Operation Market Garden* was the largest paratroop drop of the Second World War; It was also one of the worst operational failures. What strategy could have led the Allies to such an incredulous failure and what lessons can be learned for future military operations? Several timeless lessons are apparent from an analysis of the operation: (1) at the strategic level, military planners must never lose sight of the political reasons which fostered the initial conflict; (2) at the operational level, total coordination and planning with all elements of an operation remain critical to the successful execution of any plan; (3) logistics shortages caused the troops to be ill prepared; (4) most importantly, at the tactical level, commanders must learn to "read the troops," watch their collective behavior and be ready to step in to keep them focused on the ultimate goal, the satisfactory completion of the mission; (5) from a leadership perspective, we learn that truly great leaders sacrifice their personal ambitions for the good of the unit effort and the successful execution of the mission.

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## Introduction

On September 17, 1944, from airfields across southern England, the Allied forces launched a massive airborne operation, code named *Market Garden*, consisting of 1,545 troop carriers, 478 gliders, 3,500 glider men, and 16,500 paratroopers from the 1st Allied Airborne Corps, consisting of the 1st British (Airborne), the US 82nd and the US 101st Airborne Divisions.<sup>1</sup> The objective was to take and hold several key bridges over the Rhine River in Holland, while General Dempsey's 2nd British Army, specifically, General Sir Brian Horrock's XXX Corps, reached the airborne units by road. They intended to create a "corridor" through which the Allied armies would advance and drive the Wehrmacht from Holland. The Allies would then move further into Germany in pursuit of Hitler's army.<sup>2</sup> For nine days the Allied forces engaged in this operation fought the remnants of the retreating German army in and around the cities of Eindhoven, Nijmegen, and Arnhem, the Netherlands. But Horrock's XXX Corps proved unable to advance to reinforce the airborne elements and the Germans decisively defeated the paratroopers in Arnhem. Finally, on September 26, 1944, the Allies withdrew the remaining troops, having suffered almost 17,000 casualties and 7,000 plus Allied prisoners of war, of which 1,500 were wounded.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wesley Frank Craven and James Lee Cates, ed., The Army Air Forces in World War II, Volume III, Europe: Argument to V-E Day, January 1944 to May 1945. (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1983), pp. 604, 610.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 600.

<sup>3</sup> John North, North-West Europe, The Achievement of 21st Army Group. (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1953), pp. 99-100; Charles Whiting (ed.), '44: In Combat from Normandy to the Ardennes. (New York: Stein and Day, 1984), p. 149.



What possible strategy could have led the Allies into such an adventure which resulted in the incredulous waste of human life and the extension of the Second World War into 1945? Using the resource-strategy-objective model, this paper will analyze *Operation Market Garden* in an effort to explain why the Allies failed and what lessons there are for future military operations.

### PRELUDE TO *Market Garden*

Before attempting formal analysis, it will be helpful to review the positions of the Allies and the Germans in the late summer of 1944. That previous June, *Overlord* identified itself as the hugely successful landing of the Allies on the beaches of Normandy. Until July 25th, Allied progress was unexpectedly sluggish, resulting primarily from stiff German resistance aided by the unfriendly topography of northern France. The "hedge rows"--combinations of shrubs, hedges, and trees which serve as fencing and delineate farming plots--substantially hindered offensive mechanized operations. The time delay from D-Day to breakout, however, allowed the Allies to replace equipment, vehicles, and personnel lost in the *Overlord* landings. By late July, the Allies' logistics preponderance placed them in good condition. When the breakout finally occurred, it employed 25 divisions under the leadership of British Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery and US Army General Omar Bradley. General Dwight Eisenhower was the Supreme Allied Commander.

The breakout plan directed Montgomery and the 21st British Army Group to move eastward to recapture Belgium and to advance into the industrial heartland of Nazi Germany: the Ruhr Valley. Bradley and the US 12th Army

Group was to head south and then turn east through the Belgian Ardennes into Luxembourg and end up at the Saar River Valley, Germany's second most important industrial area. General George Patton was to advance through the southern flank and join Bradley. This plan became known as Eisenhower's famous broad front attack (Figure 1).

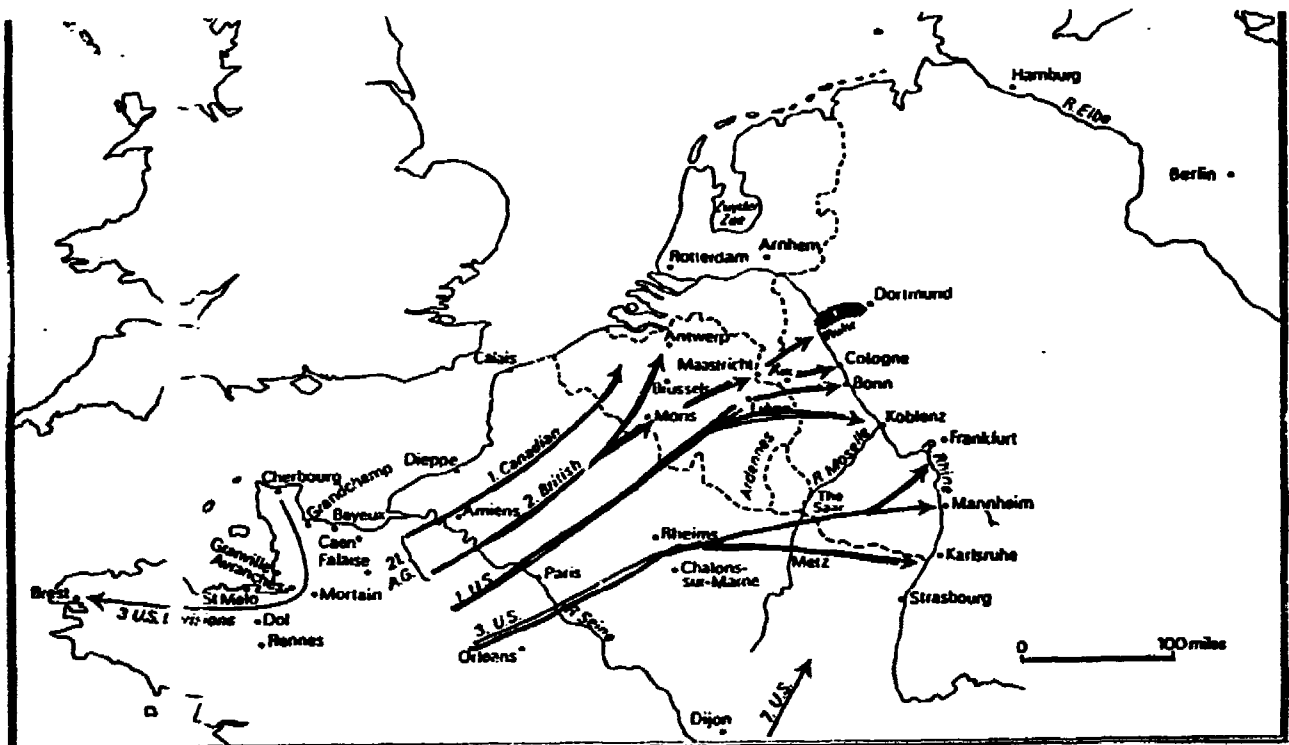


Figure 1. Allied Broad Front Strategy

During this time, the Fuhrer himself increasingly oversaw and controlled German operations. After an abortive assassination attempt in mid-July, Adolf Hitler purged the armed forces of much of their senior leadership talent and experience.<sup>4</sup> Karl von Rundstedt and Erwin Rommel were

<sup>4</sup> Max Hastings, Victory in Europe: D-Day to V-E Day, Boston: (Little, Brown and Co., 1985), pp. 87-88; David Fraser, And We Shall Shock Them...The British Army in the Second World War, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983), p. 348; Richard Lamb, Montgomery in Europe, 1943-1945. Success or Failure, (New York: Franklin Watts,

replaced by the Fuhrer for suggesting that huge losses dictated a German retreat. Similarly, Rommel's replacement, Hans Gunther von Kluge, was removed for the German defeat at St. Lo. SS General Walter Model, Kluge's successor, moved forces to strengthen the Falais Gap but sustained 50,000 prisoners and 10,000 casualties before eventually retreating under heavy Allied ground and air attacks. By mid August, the German 7th and 15th SS Panzer Divisions were shattered and Hodges held 25,000 prisoners at Mons. The German army withdrew to their southern border and held tenaciously to Northern Belgium and Holland.

On the Eastern front, the Russians seized territory at a phenomenal rate: 250 miles from 22 June until mid August. In fact, the Red Army had marched to within 50 miles of the German border with East Prussia by August 10.<sup>5</sup> Although it did not appear at the time that the Nazi war machine was in immediate danger of collapse, the combined Allied effort convinced the senior German military leaders that defeat was forthcoming.

The unexpected and rapid Allied advances, especially along the coast of Northern France, cost Hitler the French ports from which U-boat attacks against US and British shipping proved so effective. Finally, the advance denied the Reich vital raw materials and manufactured goods as well as Hitler's V1 and V2 launch areas in Holland.<sup>6</sup> According to Max Hastings, the Russians had also taken Bulgaria and Rumania by mid-September, including the oil rich port of Ploesti.<sup>7</sup> Oil and petroleum were becoming scarce and critical. Yet, it is crucial to note that German industry continued to produce

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1984). p. 212: Field Marshall Sir Bernhard Montgomery. Normandy To The Baltic. (Germany: Printing and Stationery Services, British Army of the Rhine, 1946), p. 170.

<sup>5</sup> Hastings, op. cit., pp. 83-84.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

ammunition, tanks, guns, and armaments, sometimes under terrible working conditions and with no apparent drop in productivity!<sup>8</sup>

#### DDAY MINUS 17

By the first of September, General "Ike" Eisenhower, who took personal command of the ground forces from Montgomery, faced three problems: one, conflicting strategies surfaced on how best to pursue the German army; two, the Allied logistics lines of communication were overextended as a result of the rapid advances, and the Allies maintained supplies, especially fuel, at critically low levels; and three, constant bickering and rivalry over strategy and resources marked the relations of his commanding generals.<sup>9</sup>

Although the coalition force leaders previously discussed a general strategy for pursuing the Germans, the successful execution of *Overlord* uncovered an inadequate follow-on strategy. Consequently, after the victories in France had accelerated the campaign, the actual speed of the Allied advances had not allowed time for the strategy to develop.<sup>10</sup> By mid-August, Montgomery, who had been "considering how best the Allies should be handled after breakout had occurred," approached Eisenhower with a strategy to defeat Hitler.<sup>11</sup> The plan involved a huge, single thrust through Belgium and Holland, eventually ending at the Ruhr Valley. With augmentation and redistribution of supplies from Bradley and Patton, Montgomery proposed that his plan should be done by his 21st Army

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> Charles B. Mac Donald, *The Mighty Endeavor: The American War in Europe*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), p. 361.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander: The War Years of General Dwight David Eisenhower*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970), p. 531.

<sup>11</sup> Major General Sir Francis De Guingand, *Operation Victory* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1947), p. 411.

Group.<sup>12</sup> In addition, "Monty" wanted three divisions of highly trained paratroopers from Eisenhower's reserve, at the time sitting idly in the United Kingdom, to carpet several cities in Holland. The paratroopers would take key bridgeheads over the Rhine and form a "corridor" through which the British army could march. Montgomery reasoned that once the Ruhr was open then the rest of Germany would fall quickly because the majority of German industry would be in the hands of the Allies. This idea became the seed from which *Operation Market Garden* grew.<sup>13</sup>

General Eisenhower did not favor Montgomery's idea of a single thrust but rather preferred a broad front attack, employed successfully by Allied armies during the Normandy breakout (Figure 2). On the 29th of August, after a thorough review of his strategy and the post D Day plan, Ike reiterated his broad front strategy in a memo to his commanders. He felt strongly that one thrust such as suggested by Montgomery revealed Allied plans. With two approaches, at least, the Germans would always be guessing where the next attack would be (Figures 1 and 2).<sup>14</sup>

However, Eisenhower's second and perhaps more pressing logistical problem--that of what to do about the long supply lines, lack of fuel and inadequate transportation--had to be solved first. The Allies continued to receive their supplies through the landing beaches of Normandy. The problem worsened once supplies arrived, as there were not enough trucks available to haul necessities to the armies. With the advance of cold weather

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<sup>12</sup> David Irving, *The War Between the Generals* (New York: Congdon and Lattes, Inc., 1981), p. 269; Craven, *op. cit.*, p. 599; MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 269; De Guingand, *op. cit.*, pp. 410-412.

<sup>13</sup> Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 342; Martin Van Creveld, *Supplying War-Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 217.

<sup>14</sup> MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 360 and Craven, *op. cit.*, pp. 598-599; Major General Sir Francis De Guingand, *The Generals at War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), p. 104.

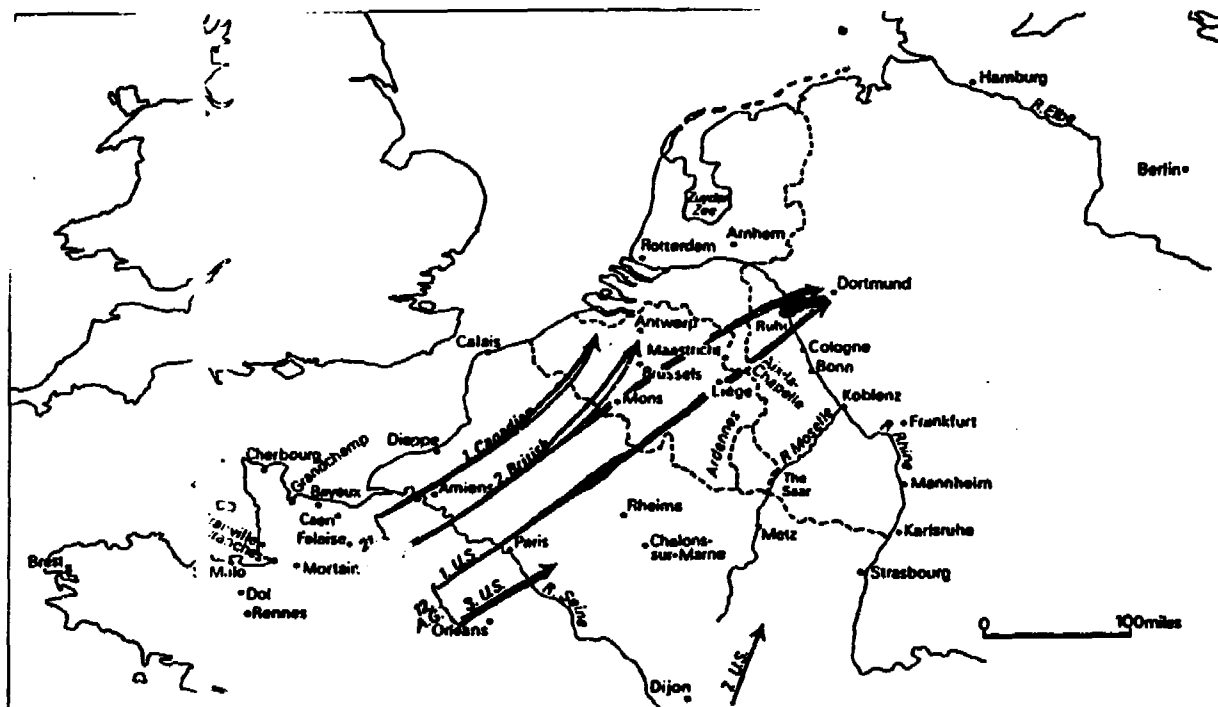


Figure 2. Montgomery's Narrow Thrust Strategy.

and winter, which made unloading supplies on the landing beaches difficult, if not impossible, Ike desperately needed a deep water port from which to transfer supplies to the front. Further, as the Germans retreated, they mined the coastal harbors and destroyed much of the shipping infrastructure. Like the Reich, fuel became the logistic shortfall and this limitation halted the advance of the armies of both Hodges and Patton.<sup>15</sup>

The constant bickering and rivalry amongst Ike's generals exacerbated the situation. Other general officers characterized Montgomery as difficult to get along with; a loner, he remained focused on his own glory rather than the

<sup>15</sup> Mac Donald, *op. cit.*, p. 363; Irving, *op. cit.*, p. 268; Ambrose, *op. cit.*, p. 425; Ronald Levin, *Montgomery As Military Commander*, (New York: Stein and Day, 1971), p. 235; Field Marshall Sir Bernhard Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field Marshall The Viscount Montgomery of Alamein*, (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1958), pp. 248, 251.

Allied effort.<sup>16</sup> The Montgomery proposal for a single thrust operation bolstered these feelings of animosity. Further, Montgomery complained ceaselessly to Ike about the amount of supplies his army received and constantly pressed for priority on fuel and ammunition. General Bedell Smith, Eisenhower's Chief of Staff, reportedly remarked that Montgomery "...deserved the greatest censure for his intransigence and behind the scenes conniving to enhance his own prestige and to obtain a major measure of command."<sup>17</sup> Montgomery looked upon Bradley and Patton as "Johnny-come-latelys" who lacked experience and knowledge because the US entered the war late.

When Ike took personal command of the European ground operation, the situation worsened.<sup>18</sup> As MGen Freddie De Guingand, Montgomery's Chief of Staff, noted, "now, Montgomery, although he knew and approved of these preparations (for Eisenhower's assumption of command of the ground forces) ... (he) never thought that the day would come so soon."<sup>19</sup>

A divisive command issue arose out of Eisenhower's decision to take control of the ground operations for Europe. Although renowned for his military skill and leadership, not only in North Africa at El Alamein but also in *Overlord*, Montgomery could not, for political reasons, be named the Supreme Allied Commander. As such, "Monty" lobbied "Ike" hard to be named the ground forces commander. Electing to retain that duty for

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<sup>16</sup> Irving, *op. cit.*, p.268; Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, A General's Life (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), pp. 327-328.

<sup>17</sup> Irving, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Blumenson, ed., The Patton Papers, 1940-1945, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), pp. 547-548.

<sup>19</sup> De Guingand, *op. cit.*, The Generals at War, p. 100; Nigel Hamilton, Master of the Battlefield. Monty's War Years, 1942-1944 (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1983), p. 688.

himself, Eisenhower faced open and continual challenges from Montgomery and a small number of his British colleagues. In combination with this issue of command and control, Montgomery, who thought himself a more qualified military commander, belligerently doubted Eisenhower on nearly every strategic decision. This overt disrespect created further turmoil, distrust, and tension among the generals. Yet Eisenhower, who was known for his patience, did not act on Montgomery's behavior until after *Market Garden* when he threatened to take the matter to Marshall and Churchill. Montgomery's Chief of Staff finally settled the matter before Ike elevated it, preventing Montgomery from being fired.

After having a few days to review Montgomery's proposal, General Eisenhower agreed to the plan on 4 September. His approval came in part as an effort to quiet and assuage the complaining Montgomery but more importantly, Eisenhower recognized his opportunity to gain access to a deep water port. The *Market Garden* plan, bold and risky, was out of character for the normally conservative Montgomery.<sup>20</sup> As a result of his approval, Ike gave Montgomery temporary supply priority for fuel and ammunition, and realigned the US First Army under General Hodges on the British southern flank, until the Allies secured Antwerp. Ike wanted the ports of Antwerp and Le Havre cleared of all remaining German resistance. This would provide the Allies much needed deep water ports, significantly reducing the delivery time of critical war reserve materiel to the front line armies (Figure 3).

The sustainment required for the next phase of operations, that is, the movement of the Allies into Germany and the taking of Berlin, had to be

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<sup>20</sup> Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 237.



insured and was contingent upon the successful occupation of a port facility, capable of sustaining a fighting force of over two million men. Antwerp was the only port in Europe with that capacity. "While the offensive towards the Ruhr would always have priority, it was Ike's intention to occupy the Saar and the Ruhr while clearing operations Le Havre and Antwerp were

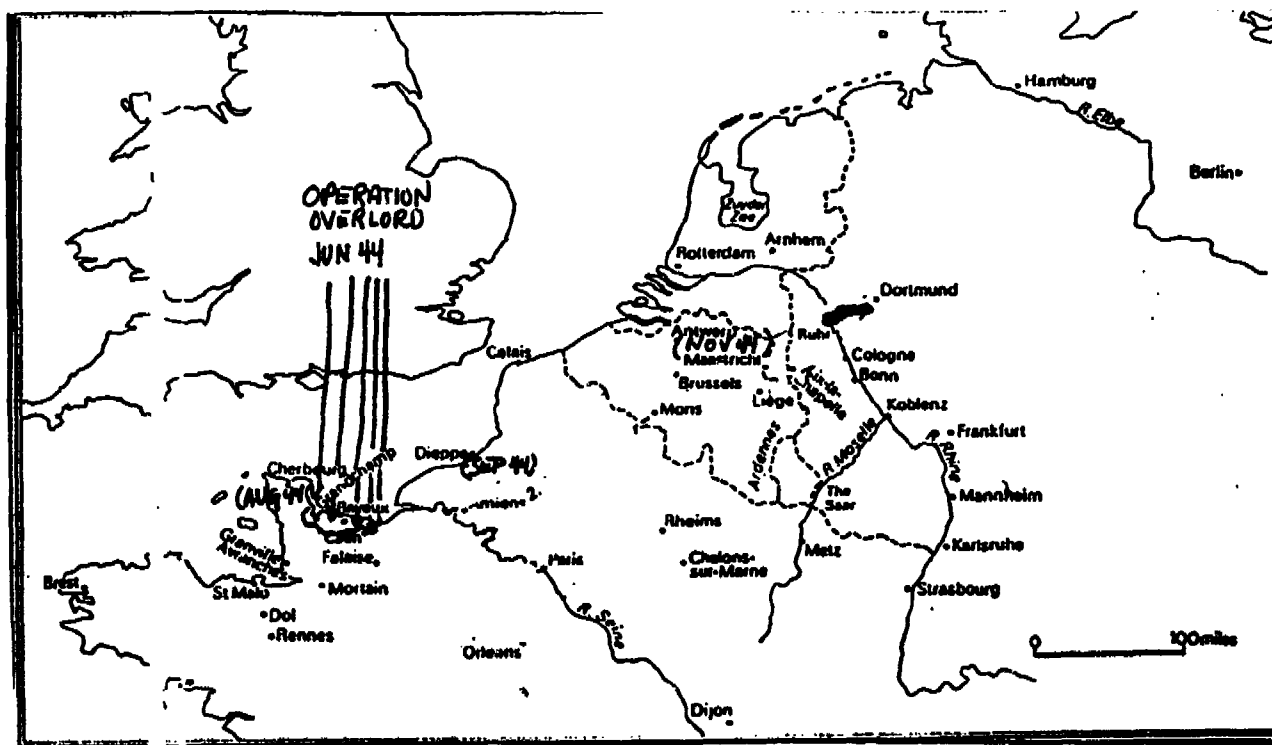


Figure 3. Allied Port Situation, 15 September 1944

completed."<sup>21</sup> Montgomery was furious at the idea of a combined thrust which included the Saar valley ... and remarked, "if only Patton's transport and petrol were diverted to 21st Army Group," then he could convince

<sup>21</sup> Lamb, *op. cit.*, p. 209; North, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

Eisenhower of the merits of a single concentration of force into the industrial heart of the Reich.<sup>22</sup>

Montgomery took the port of Antwerp on the 4th of September. Eisenhower, over the objections of his staff, permitted Montgomery to proceed into Belgium, without clearing the Schelde Estuary of German resistance. Montgomery also persuaded Eisenhower to allow *Market Garden* to continue as planned, rather than to delay to clear the port, as Bradley and Patton desired. However, the day of execution would prove to be the only aspect of the operation which changed and was moved by Montgomery to facilitate more detailed planning.<sup>23</sup>

The announcement of Eisenhower's decision to support Montgomery, and the delivery of the subsequent execution order for *Market Garden*, evoked a variety of emotional and professional objections across the Allied spectrum. According to David Irving, "Omar Bradley was nauseated by the decision ... and immediately phoned Patton ... to assure him in person he would give Third Army half of any supplies available to his army group."<sup>24</sup> From an operational perspective, Montgomery's own staff remained against the plan. "Brigadier Belcham, Chief of Operations, disliked the narrowness of the thrust, along low ground ... Brigadier Richardson, Chief of Plans, did not know of the proposed drop until several days after the announcement."<sup>25</sup> Instead, Richardson favored an Allied advance through Aachen vice the

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208; Lewan, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207; Montgomery, admitted that the fatal flaw in Operation Market Garden and even in the War, was the failure to clear the Schelde Estuary. Montgomery left this task to the 1st Canadian Army, under General Crerar and after Market Garden failed, had to return to robust the operation with more troops to finally clear the port by November 7.

<sup>24</sup> Irving, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

<sup>25</sup> Nigel Hamilton, *Monty, Final Years of the Field-Marshal, 1944-1976* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1986), p. 72.

topographically difficult lowlands of Holland. Furthermore, intelligence reports, via Ultra, revealed a disturbing reinforcement of troops and armor in Arnhem, in the Albert Canal area, and along the border with Luxembourg.<sup>26</sup> Dempsey, Commander of the British Second Army, personally visited Montgomery to express his deep concern over both the Ultra information and Dutch resistance reports of an unknown number of tanks near Nijmegen and Arnhem. Extremely worried about "increased resistance in the Albert Canal area, Dempsey doubted his army's ability to advance as quickly as the plan required and to join up with the airborne who were to hold bridges for his arrival."<sup>27</sup> Finally, "Monty's" own Chief of Staff, MGen Freddie De Guingand, telephoned from his hospital bed... "to warn Monty that the combined efforts of increasing enemy resistance and logistical dependence on the winning of more deep water ports, made such a unilateral thrust a very doubtful position."<sup>28</sup> Yet, Montgomery persisted in his objective of opening up the Rhine and doing it before either Patton or Bradley. "The utmost drive and energy was centered on speeding up preparations (for *Market Garden*); in deciding on the target date of 17 September ... time had been cut to an absolute minimum ... to plan an operation of this scope."<sup>29</sup> And so, on Sunday, the 17th of September, 1944, the Allies launched the largest paratroop drop of the Second World War.

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<sup>26</sup> Diane T. Putney (ed.), ULTRA and the Army Air Forces in World War II: An Interview with Associate Justice of the US Supreme Court Lewis F. Powell, Junior. (Washington D. C.: Office of Air Force History, 1987) p. 39 Footnote, 56. Lamb, op. cit., p. 215; Hamilton, op. cit., p. 72; Irving, op. cit., p. 275.

<sup>27</sup> Lamb, op. cit., pp 214-216.

<sup>28</sup> Hamilton, op. cit. *Monty: Final Years*, p. 72.

<sup>29</sup> North, op. cit., p. 92.

### The Operation, 17 September, 1944

A day aeronautically superb for an airdrop, as it progressed the weather over the English airfields, and later the Dutch coast, worsened: the second wave remained unable to drop for four more days.<sup>30</sup> However, the initial gains of the 82nd and 101st Airborne at Grave and Nijmegen secured their bridgeheads with minimal losses (Figure 4). The First Airborne Division (British) was not as lucky. Dropped short of their landing zone, they encountered General Model's 9th and 10th Panzer (SS) Divisions as well as some very strongly armed units of the German 15th Army. Despite warnings from his staff and ignoring the intelligence reports from Ultra and the Dutch resistance, Montgomery put the First Airborne Division literally in

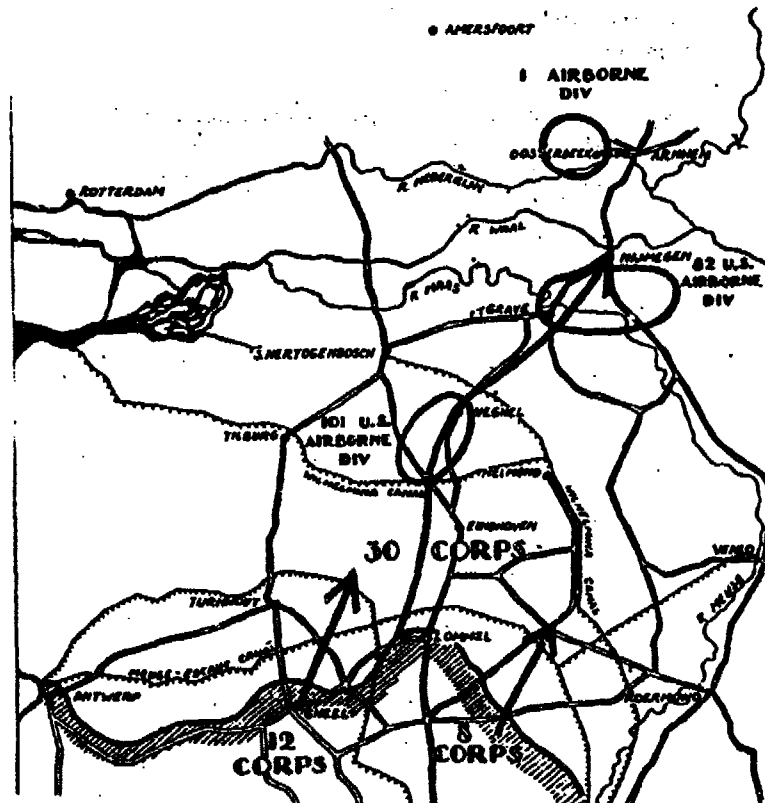


Figure 4. Second Army's Advance To Arnhem

<sup>30</sup> Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 346; Craven, *op. cit.*, p. 610.

the middle of the SS hornet's nest.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, at Eindhoven, Dempsey with the 2nd British Army encountered unexpectedly tough German resistance and his forward progress slowed because of the exact same concerns previously voiced to Montgomery. In fact, the Germans blocked the highway and smaller roads leading to Arnhem as the newly reinforced German 15th Army halted Dempsey's advance with massive shelling and artillery barrages (Figure 5). By the 23rd, the British reached the lower

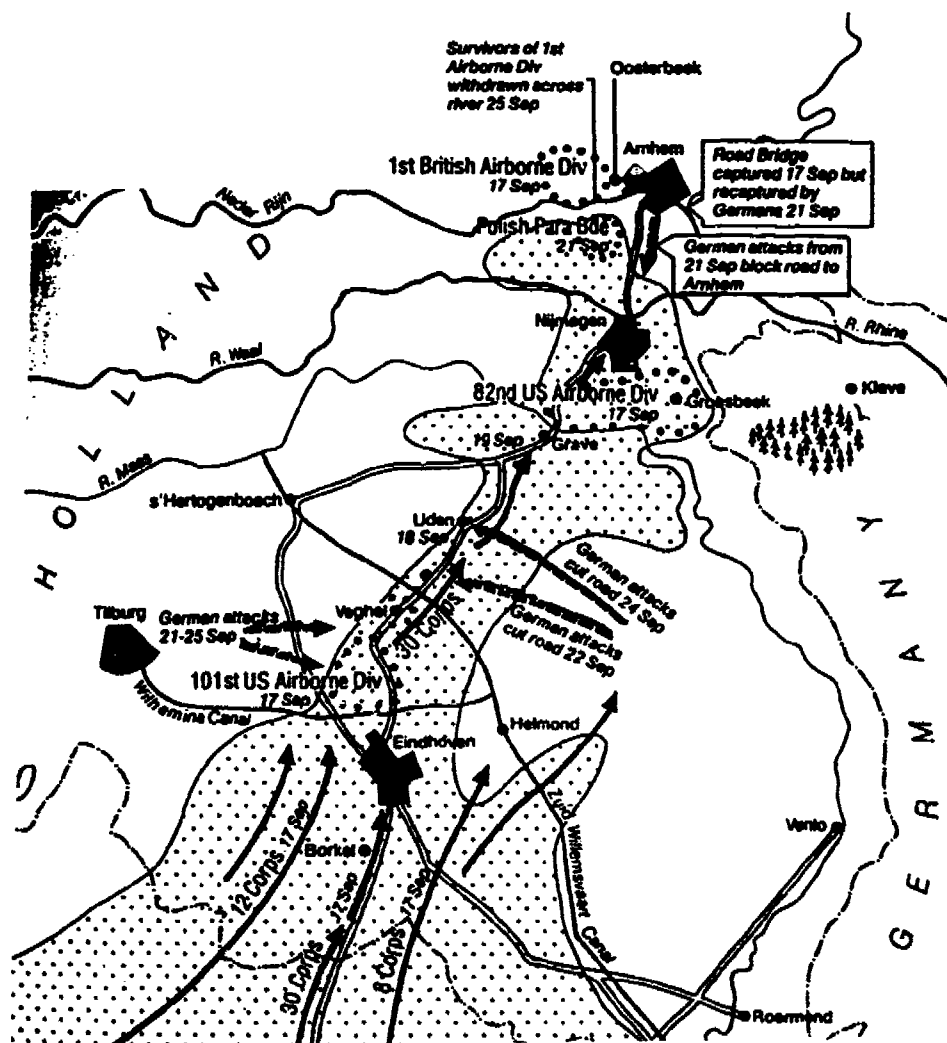


Figure 5. Operation Market Garden

<sup>31</sup> Lamb, *op. cit.*, p. 226; Mac Donald, *op. cit.*, p. 375.

Rhine but could not join with elements of the First Airborne Division. Finally, after nine days of the fiercest fighting since *Operation Overlord*, the Allies withdrew. Unable to rescue all of their personnel, a huge number of casualties and prisoners of war had to be abandoned. Sadly, this defeat may have caused the war to extend into 1945.

### The Quest for the Ruhr: the Ill-fated *Market Garden*

After reading the chronology of *Market Garden* or having at least seen the film *A Bridge Too Far*, one still must wonder, if the objective was achievable? Was the strategy flawed and doomed from the start? What about Allied resources, were they adequate considering Eisenhower's logistic problems? Through an analysis of the objective, the strategy employed, and the resources available to execute the plan, there may be clues as to why the operation failed and lessons to be utilized for future operations.

To take and hold the bridges over the Rhine, Meuse, and Waal Rivers was Montgomery's idea and was formulated within the larger framework of the Eisenhower goal of taking the Ruhr Valley. Montgomery developed the strategy entirely by himself and in it, he advocated one major offensive effort. This thrust should cross the Rhine, north of the Ruhr into the heartland of Germany. By so doing, Montgomery hoped to see the enemy brought to its knees (by denying them this great industrial region). This, Montgomery felt, would lead to the early collapse of the Reich.<sup>32</sup> Montgomery deliberately picked Arnhem rather than Wesel because there were fewer anti-aircraft defenses and there was the added plus that, if

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<sup>32</sup> Brian Montgomery, *A Field Marshall In The Family*, (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1974), pp. 315-316.

successful, he would simultaneously destroy the V1 and V2 launch sites which had been so deadly to the city of London.<sup>33</sup>

The resources available for *Market Garden* proved, in retrospect, talented yet limited, as was the case with the paratroopers designated for the operation. Although rested and ready to get into action because some had not jumped since Normandy, they had been activated several times only to be cancelled at the last minute because of the rapid ground gains. These units were elements of the US 82nd Airborne under MGen James Gavin; the US 101st Airborne under MGen Maxwell Taylor; and finally, the 1st Airborne Division, comprised of British, Canadian, and Polish soldiers, under British Army MGen Roy Urquhart.<sup>34</sup> A second resource was Ultra, the successful decoding of German messages and operational orders. Ultra enabled the Allies to know in advance many of the moves made by Hitler.<sup>35</sup> Ultra, in combination with human intelligence sources from the Dutch underground, identified the equipment and tank build-up operations in the Nijmegen and Arnhem areas ten days before D-Day. Ultra estimates of residual German forces from 15th Army proved fairly accurate, especially in the Antwerp area. The port of Antwerp with its access to the ocean through the Scheldt Estuary, proved to be a third resource. Antwerp offered the solution to the supply and fuel delivery problems. Further, Antwerp was captured virtually intact and would require little work to restore to operational condition.<sup>36</sup> This was a distinct advantage because other

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<sup>33</sup> Irving, *op. cit.*, p. 280; Lamb, *op. cit.*, pp. 213-214, 227.

<sup>34</sup> Montgomery, *op. cit. Memoirs*, p. 246.

<sup>35</sup> Putney, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>36</sup> Irving, *op. cit.*, p. 269; Montgomery, *op. cit. Memoirs*, p. 266.

captured ports, such as Dieppe and Cherbourg, had been heavily damaged by the retreating Germans and required months of extensive labor to restore.

The momentum of advancing Allied troops coupled with the alleged exhaustion, frustration, and rapid retreat of the Germans presented opportunities the Allies could easily exploit. Again, Ultra provided a late August assessment of the German army in the West as "having been irretrievably broken."<sup>37</sup> The long and hasty retreat supposedly left the Germans disorganized and ill equipped.<sup>38</sup>

A final advantage and resource for the Allies was the operation itself which called for surprise, initiative, and a lightning attack through a route of travel thought to be easier than through the Ardennes. There were no hills or heavily forested areas to make maneuver difficult. Timing, weather, and initiative would be the resources which would lead to a successful operation.

### The Final Analysis

Judging from the outcome, *Market Garden* was found to be not a feasible, "do-able" operation. To begin with, the objective ended up a difficult one. The plan assumed the bridges would be as easy to recapture as bridges in France had been; however, Montgomery and the Allies underestimated the tremendous resolve of Hitler and the German army. Ultra reports indicating that Hitler had rearmed along the Siegfried Line, the Albert Canal in Belgium, and in Arnhem were acknowledged but discounted by Montgomery himself. Eisenhower, told about the German reinforcement efforts, but, because his difficulty in communicating with Montgomery, did not personally challenge the plan based on the intelligence reports. Instead, he sent Bedell Smith to

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<sup>37</sup> Hastings, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>38</sup> Mac Donald, *op. cit.*, p. 370; Montgomery, *op. cit.*, *Memoirs*, pp 243-244.



see Montgomery "who ridiculed the idea (that the objective was difficult), merely because of reports of German tank strength at Arnhem...and would not revise *Market Garden*"<sup>39</sup>

Montgomery also failed to appreciate the difference in terrain and topography between the lower Rhine and France, which made achieving the objective difficult and challenging. Roads were very narrow, usually built on top of dikes, while the lower roads flooded frequently resulting in heavy clay mud. Travel would be slower than it had been in other parts of Europe. Further, the boggy, marshy land prevented maneuver of the heavy equipment which often sank up to the axles once the vehicle left the road. Again, ignoring the advice of his staff and disregarding Dempsey's concerns for a timely convergence with the airborne, Montgomery tenaciously pressed ahead.

Even if the objective was achievable, the strategy remained riddled with flaws. Again, had the Ultra reports been heeded, the entire operation could have been stopped or at least delayed. The narrowness of the corridor gave Dempsey little maneuver room and severely limited his flexibility and exercise of surprise. Further, the strategy did not include any air component tasking other than fighter escort of transports and gliders. Some deep interdiction missions were run against railroad junctions and were designed to interrupt German transportation of reinforcing supplies and personnel but these remained south along the Siegfried line.<sup>40</sup>

It also appears that very little coalition coordination in the planning of *Market Garden* was exercised. Montgomery merely handed the plan to his staff for execution. In fact, MGen Maxwell Taylor phoned Montgomery to

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<sup>39</sup> Lamb, *op. cit.*, p.226.

<sup>40</sup> Craven, *op. cit.*, p. 600.

personally voice his objections to the landing zone for his personnel and was told that it was too late to change the plan.<sup>41</sup> MGen Roy Urquhart encountered the same lack of cooperation when he tried to talk to Montgomery.<sup>42</sup> The strategy also presupposed the availability of adequate amounts of petroleum and ammunition to execute the plan: Montgomery wanted Bradley and Patton's fuel rather than to stop long enough to clear the Germans from the Scheldt Estuary. Possession of the Scheldt would have opened Antwerp to supplies for all Allied armies. In addition, Bradley and Patton's activities to the south served to further divert German personnel and resources, thus supporting Ike's broad front strategy.

Not only was the objective questionable and the strategy flawed, but the resources were limited. To begin with, it was a strategic and logistical error to continue through Antwerp without first clearing pockets of German resistance. The resistance proved especially heavy in the Scheldt Estuary, the key access to the North Sea. This chokepoint was not eliminated until November 1944!<sup>43</sup> Thus, this failure denied the Allies the desperately needed deep water port and shortened logistics lines, critical to any further operations in the interior of Germany. The failure to eliminate resistance also hampered Dempsey's progress because he had to divert fighting troops

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<sup>41</sup> Lamb, *op. cit.*, p.220.

<sup>42</sup> Don Congdon, ed., *Combat: WWII European Theater of Operations*. (New York: Arbor House, 1983), pp. 382-384.

<sup>43</sup> Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 370; Lamb *op. cit.*, p.216. Montgomery sold the idea of going back to Antwerp and clearing out the resistance after Market Garden was executed and successful. Ike agreed. So in this regard, Montgomery was not operating unilaterally. However, several sources point out that Eisenhower had not paid enough attention to the Ultra reports and to his staff regarding the strength of resistance. Had he done so, perhaps Montgomery would have been forced to clear the estuary first before Market Garden, and the complexion and direction of the war would have changed. It should also be noted that Montgomery, years later, admitted that not clearing the Schelde estuary was a mistake.

to protect his flank. In fact, his line of march was twice cut by the German army, forcing him to stop, regroup, and secure his avenue.

The airdrop was hindered logistically because there were not enough transport and glider aircraft to make one single drop as called for in Montgomery's plan.<sup>44</sup> Further, when the second wave did finally arrive, it was poorly equipped to meet the Panzer SS armored threat. The First Airborne did not even have adequate radios to communicate within their units!<sup>45</sup> Senior paratroop leaders worried about the drop zones and armament for their troops but their concerns were ignored, as noted earlier. Adverse weather contributed to the delay of the second wave when clouds and rain prevented them from arriving on D-Day. The weather was a favorable resource for the first drop but turned against the Allies for the second drop, delaying resupply and reinforcements for the Arnhem troops. The Germans, however, successfully capitalized on the poor weather utilizing the time to strengthen their forces to counter the Allies. As such, an aspect of the operation thought to be a premier resource, the crack paratroopers, proved to be a severe limitation to Allied success.

Montgomery's cavalier attitude toward the Ultra and Dutch resistance reports shows he failed to use one of the most valuable tools available to *Operation Market Garden*. What is more difficult to comprehend, however, is why he chose to ignore his talented and experienced staff. Legitimate concerns raised by seasoned infantry and airborne officers were dismissed out-of-hand by Montgomery. He also paid no heed to other concerned Allied officers. MGen Stanislaw Sosabowski of the Polish Independent Paratroop Brigade told Montgomery that the "plan for his troops to land near Arnhem

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<sup>44</sup> Craven, *op. cit.*, p. 601.

<sup>45</sup> Hastings, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

... was disastrous and that senior planners were guilty of reckless overconfidence."<sup>46</sup> Staff members could do nothing but sit in silent frustration and do as they were told. Bedell Smith, worried over the plan, admitted, "I can not change his mind."<sup>47</sup> MGen Freddie De Guingand, the only person who was reputed to have any influence on Montgomery, was not physically present on the Continent.<sup>48</sup>

If Montgomery was thought to be arrogant and self-confident, it may have been with good reason, since he had been the ground forces commander during the highly successful North African campaign, as well as *Operation Overlord*. In fact, the Allies as a group suffered from this same sense of overconfidence. They had been lulled into a collective sense of cockiness and arrogance because of the rapidity with which their victories came. As Max Hastings says, "the exhilaration of pursuit caused men to fatally relax."<sup>49</sup> Tired, they began to lose focus on the mission, as was evidenced by some of the preparation activities and ensuing logistical shortfalls of *Market Garden*. The intelligence was also misleading and gave airborne units the idea that the "Germans were on their last gasp."<sup>50</sup> Hence, with no sense of urgency, extreme exhaustion, and the subsequent loss of focus, situations developed wherein troops maneuvered with inadequate resources: the deployment of the First Allied with no radios and inadequate antitank munitions serve as two examples. The momentum and "heady optimism" brought on by the Allied victories turned the army from what should have been a successful application of Allied force, into an pretentious

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<sup>46</sup> Lamb, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>48</sup> Hamilton, *op. cit.*, *Monty: Final Years*, p. 72.

<sup>49</sup> Hastings, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

and unfocused group who sustained major and unnecessary losses of equipment and personnel.

The plan itself demanded forces to seize the initiative and strike with speed to surprise the exhausted and poorly equipped Germans. Uncannily, Hitler had suspected that Montgomery would head north to the Zuider Zee and reacted by placing one of his strongest generals, Field Marshall Walter Model, in that area. Model immediately marshalled troops and began rearmament efforts for the Wehrmacht units in Holland. "Regimental and division commanders were empowered to form battle groups with such troops as they could muster locally from stragglers, reinforcements and lines of communication units."<sup>51</sup> He orchestrated the blocking of strategic highways and canals, while taking advantage of the weather and the Allies' inability to resupply and reinforce themselves. He managed to hold not only the Arnhem bridge, but also the entire city. His energy, personal effort, and organizational skills served as three key reasons for the German repulse of *Market Garden*. To summarize, the timing needed to orchestrate a rapid thrust remained "out of sync" because of a number of factors: the unexpected resistance by dedicated German soldiers; the inability to drop the second wave of paratroopers due to weather; the disregard for intelligence reports which demanded the robusting of armament for the paratroopers; and the lack of communication capability.<sup>52</sup> These factors combined to create one of the worst Allied defeats of the entire war.

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<sup>51</sup> Montgomery, *op.cit.*, *Normandy*, p. 169; Putney, *op.cit.*, p. 39; Lamb, *op.cit.*, p. 220.

<sup>52</sup> Congdon, *op.cit.*, p. 603.

## Lessons Learned

Several timeless lessons can be learned from the Allied failure at *Market Garden*. At the strategic level, *Market Garden* teaches us that military planners must never lose sight of the political reasons which fostered the initial conflict. National political will and national interests play a tremendous role in the development of coalition strategy. Since the US in 1944 contributed the majority of manpower, materiel, and money to the Allied war effort, Eisenhower's selection over Montgomery as the Supreme Allied Commander was reasonable. Ever sensitive to political and senior military bosses, primarily Roosevelt, Churchill, and Marshall, Ike remained focused on the coalition goal of "unconditional surrender." A consummate professional, he did not let the egoistical and personal ambitions of any of his generals distract him from attempting to achieve that goal. Ike listened and considered Montgomery's opinions and ideas, yet remained the architect of the multiple-pronged attack strategy. This, he knew, would lead the way to a Nazi defeat.

Two operational level lessons should be remembered from the *Market Garden* defeat. First, total coordination and planning with all elements of an operation, whether ground or air, remain critical to the successful execution of any plan. Planners gave no consideration, for example, to fighter or bomber cover or carpet bombing to soften the target area before the airdrop. Nor did anyone review the plan again when Montgomery was told that there were not enough transport aircraft to complete the drop on the first day. Certainly the plan would have taken a different form, had fighter and transport planning expertise been included in initial and follow-on planning. Secondly, logistics shortages caused both paratroopers and ground forces to

be inadequately prepared. A few days delay or the opening of the port of Antwerp may have prevented such disasters as the delivery of the wrong ammunition and the lack of radios. The combination of a fully coordinated plan and better logistical support, may have produced a different outcome.

However, the most important lesson of *Market Garden* emerges at the tactical level. Commanders and senior leaders must learn to "read the troops," watch their collective behavior, and understand their fears and concerns. Without a break, Dempsey's personnel had marched since *Overlord* and traversed through Northwestern France while fighting against some very strong opposition. Logistics and supply lines could hardly keep up, resulting in severe shortages of food, shelter, and munitions. A negative result of the rapidity with which the Allies pushed the Nazis back surfaced as a sense of self-confidence and arrogance in the troops. As a result, people lost focus of their primary mission, the results of which proved disastrous. Even more relevant today, reading the troops is a skill which goes hand-in-hand with solid leadership.

There is much to learn from analysis of the leadership during *Market Garden*. Eisenhower and Montgomery, both accomplished military leaders in their own right, could not have been further apart in style or personality. Eisenhower, as the Supreme Allied Commander, understood the sensitivities and political ramifications of the Allied coalition. Montgomery, on the other hand, as the famed leader of *Overlord* and *El Alamein*, saw only the British perspective and failed to understand that the United States, as the major provider in 1944 of manpower, materiel, and money, remained unwilling to allow the British to take the entire glory of an Allied push into Berlin. As De Guingand politely reminded Montgomery, "What would the people of

America have said if (he) had been given all those resources and yet failed? It might well have led to a crisis amongst the Allies."<sup>53</sup>

Turmoil and dissention among the Allied senior leaders created problems as well, a situation perpetuated by Montgomery's open disagreement with Ike on such issues as whether there should be a ground forces commander and on the merits of a single thrust vice broad front strategy. As Omar Bradley remembers, "Montgomery began denouncing Ike's strategic decisions and directives in the strongest possible terms. His language was so insubordinate that Ike was compelled to interrupt."<sup>54</sup> Once Eisenhower announced his decision, the arguing continued and many Allied subordinate commanders felt that Montgomery's actions warranted removal. Eisenhower did not, however, because he realized he was obliged to listen to his British allies and he "believed that he had to give Montgomery the right to full expression of his views."<sup>55</sup> This, indeed, typifies Eisenhower's sensitivities to the Allied coalition, but created frustration for the other Allied generals.

Montgomery's failure to utilize the talents of his staff and to consult with his peers on the planning of *Market Garden* further illustrates that not only was he a solitary thinker but also that he tended to develop operational plans without assistance from his staff, forcing subordinate commander execution. Ike, conversely, used his staff and very frequently conferred with his field commanders on the operational implications of various plans. Solutions to problems were worked in concert with his staff and outlined to, quite frequently, General George Marshall and Prime Minister Winston

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<sup>53</sup> De Guingand, op. cit. *Operation Victory*, p. 413.

<sup>54</sup> Bradley, op. cit. p. 330.

<sup>55</sup> Hamilton, op. cit. *Master of the Battlefield*, p. 533.



Churchill before their implementation.<sup>56</sup> It is difficult to understand why Montgomery chose not to coordinate with his airborne commanders or request fighter support other than escort for the transports. Had he coordinated his plan with his contemporaries, it would have been massaged to accommodate the logistical shortfalls or to realign transport and fighter resources so that adequate numbers remained available to accomplish the mission. There is no doubt that leadership styles and personalities played a significant role in the failure of *Market Garden* and that national interests and pride, as well as military considerations, impact success or failure of any campaign.

In summary, the lessons of *Operation Market Garden* are timeless and universal and will serve as examples to future leaders at any level of an organization. Whether a contingency operation or full blown conflict, a unilateral action or coalition effort, these lessons form the basis from which we must develop not only the men and women who will lead our forces but also the "winning" strategy, if we are to prevent the tragedy of huge personnel and materiel losses.

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<sup>56</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *At Ease: Stories I Tell To Friends* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1967), p.275.

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